

Why Mme. Tetrazzini Didn't Sing

"Won't Come to Rehearsal?" Said Walter Damrosch After the Big Orchestra Had Waited an Hour. "Then Cancel Her Engagement. The Age of Prima Donna Airs Is Past."



A GREAT painter must have "color feeling"; a successful preacher must have "spirituality," and a grand opera prima donna must have "artistic temperament."

Nobody doubts the truth of this—what, somebody DOES doubt it?

Yes, Mr. Walter Damrosch, the distinguished leader of the famous Symphony Orchestra, of New York, says that "temperament" and prima donna airs are not necessary in a great singer.

Madame Luisa Tetrazzini, the soprano, was shocked to find that the great orchestral conductor was annoyed when she kept him and his musicians waiting one whole hour for her to come to rehearsal the other day.

Tetrazzini was notified to come to rehearse her selections.

The hour was 11 in the morning—the great orchestra was there—100 men.

Mr. Damrosch stood about the leader's stand, baton in hand.

The time passed. Mr. Damrosch looked at his watch. In another ten minutes the conductor began to be restless. Then he climbed into the leader's chair and rested his head on his arm.

Twenty minutes passed—the musicians yawned and laid their instruments beside them on the floor.

Half an hour. Mr. Damrosch had lost patience, almost.

"Where is Mme. Tetrazzini?" he asked the caught sight of the doorkeeper who guarded the entrance to the auditorium of the Seventy-first Armory at Park avenue and Thirty-fourth street in New York.

The doorkeeper lifted his cap. "I have seen her, sir," he answered.

The famous conductor of the famous Symphony Orchestra espied the stage doorkeeper. That functionary loves music and lingers near the great stage while rehearsals are in progress.

Mr. Damrosch lifted his voice a bit. A hundred men who compose the orchestra looked their surprise.

"Don't leave the door," he commanded. "I may be waiting to be shown the way to the stage."

The man in uniform moved back to his place, acceding.

Five minutes passed. The huge auditorium was silent. There was pain in that silence. It throbbed, as it were, with apprehension. The hundred men fidgeted in their chairs. They had recourse to their cigarettes. They turned eyes anxious toward the great Damrosch.

He forsook the leader's stand and strode down one aisle. He paced back again in another aisle. He looked toward the stage door. Nothing but the dusk of the stage by day. He glanced over his shoulder at the front door. No sound. The form save the distant one of the doorkeeper.

Mr. Damrosch folded his arms. A frown creased upon his brow. The men of the orchestra puffed swift sympathetic spurts of smoke from their cigarettes. It was a sight, their great leader vexed.

He strode up the aisle. He appeared at the door of the box office. "Telephone the manager of the Symphony Orchestra and tell him we have waited a half hour and Mme. Tetrazzini is not here."

Excited voices staccatoed over the wires. "Tell Mr. Damrosch we will make instant inquiries."

The conductor went back to his stand. Another quarter hour passed. Walter Damrosch rose. He was about to address the orchestra. His lips were shaping themselves to the words, "You are dismissed." The first violin raised arresting eyebrows and stared up the aisle. Mr. Damrosch's speech was suspended. His eye followed that of the first violinist.

Down the aisle came hurrying a small man with thick gray hair. Beneath his hat arm he carried several sheets of music. On his face was a look of extreme anxiety.

He bowed to the towering conductor and held out his face. "Mme. Tetrazzini cannot come to the rehearsal," he said.

"Is Mme. Tetrazzini ill?" Conductor Damrosch's face and tone were solicitous. "No, signor, she is quite well. But she cannot come to the rehearsal."

"But we must rehearse."

"She cannot come. She is not dressed."

"Tell her to put on a wrapper and hurry at once and come to rehearsal."

"She asked me to show you her music, the tempi marked!"

The little man offered the sheets of music. Mr. Damrosch looked down at him. Then he looked at his watch.

"Tell Mme. Tetrazzini that I will give her until 12 to come to this rehearsal."

The little man bowed and hurried away. Mr. Damrosch stood at the leader's stand and folded his arms.

Again there was silence, a silence that seemed to throb with anticipation. The

musicians puffed little spasmodic spurts of smoke from their cigarettes.

There was an ominous whirring of some distant, deliberate clock. One hundred pairs of eyes were turned toward the main entrance. Mr. Damrosch's gray gaze was bent upon the music on his rack. But he did not read the notes before him.

One, two, three, four. The door opened at the front, but it was only the doorkeeper making his way to the box office. Five, six, seven. Between Mr. Damrosch's eyes appeared a deep furrow.

Nine, ten, eleven. His tall figure straightened. The flare of his nostrils widened. Twelve. His voice rang out with decision.

"You are dismissed until the usual time for the afternoon concert. Good morning, gentlemen."

He telephoned the manager of the office of the Symphony Society of New York: "Mme. Tetrazzini would not come to rehearsal. Cancel her engagement. We must secure another prima donna for tomorrow afternoon. Mme. Schumann Heink? Very well."

That is the reason why Mme. Schumann Heink was the soloist at the concert of the Music Festival and why, facing her from a seat near the middle of the house, sat Mme. Tetrazzini.

Mme. Tetrazzini did not obey the musical director's call to come to the rehearsal. Mme. Tetrazzini's engagement was therefore cancelled. And so it was that Mme. Tetrazzini did not sing that Sunday afternoon—and incidentally Mme. Tetrazzini lost the \$4,000 she would have been paid for singing.

Explaining it all, Mr. Damrosch said:

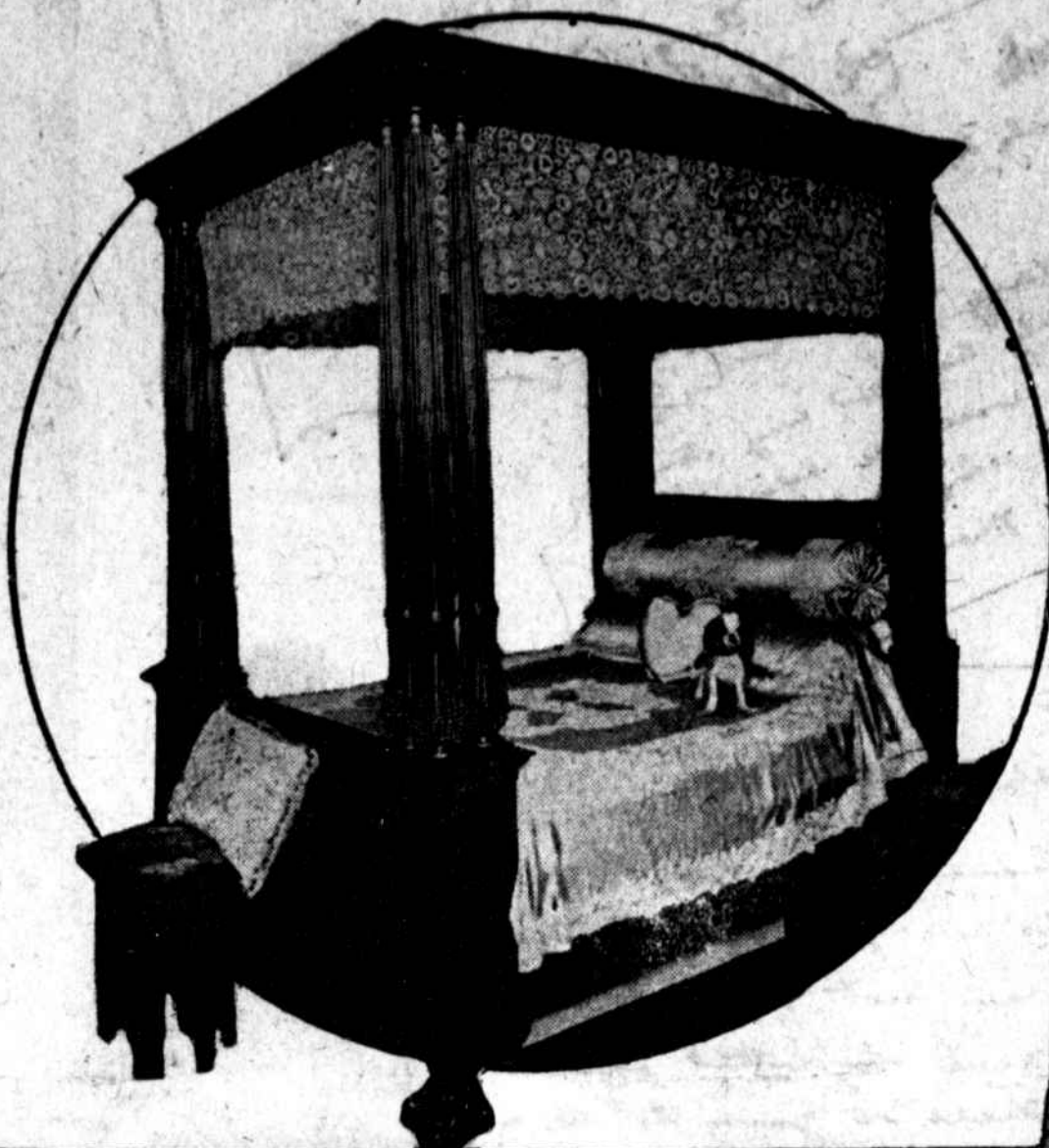
"It is a relic of a prima donna age that has passed. Fifty, no, seventy-five years ago it was permitted a singer to waive a rehearsal. But that time has forever gone. Now the greater the artist the more anxious is he or she for rehearsals. Mme. Frieda Hempel, of the Metropolitan Opera Company, is called for rehearsal at 10 o'clock in the morning and is there at the clock stroke. Reinald Werrenrath and Mabel Garrison are eager for rehearsals. Caruso is most particular about his rehearsals. Some of the artists have had not one rehearsal but three for a concert. They have been more than willing. They have been anxious to rehearse. Prima donna whims are a thing of the past."

"Mme. Tetrazzini showed herself quite indifferent to or insensible of the dignity of the Oratorio Society's Music Festival. It may be all right when one is barn-storming to shun rehearsals. But the best music is a series of fine adjustments of voices and instruments and conditions. I had not heard Mme. Tetrazzini sing for fifteen years. That was when she was with Oscar Hammerstein at the Manhattan Opera House. It was necessary that she and the orchestra become acquainted. I wished only twenty minutes from her. A matching of the voice with some of the instruments, a running of a few cadenzas with the oboe accompaniment—what every prima donna does."

"I had called a rehearsal of Mme. Tetrazzini for Wednesday. She let me know that she could not attend because she had a concert engagement. That was all right. Although I had two concerts that day I changed the call to Saturday morning. On Saturday morning I had every right to expect her to be at the armory. I knew that her manager, Mr. Jules Dalber, had notified her to be there at ten. Since she was not we proceeded with the rehearsals of other artists. The others finished but there was no sight nor sound of her. Had she sent a telegram or a note or telephoned giving a reason for her absence I would have given the message due consideration. But she did nothing of the kind. When she had kept us waiting a half hour, three-quarters of an hour, a little frightened man, who said he was her representative, came to me with her score marked. He said: 'This is the way Madame sings these selections.'

"I asked him if she was ill. He said she was not, but that she was not dressed. I told him to ask her to put on a wrapper

For One Long Hour Mr. Damrosch, the Conductor, Waited, and His Hundred Musicians Sat About Their Instruments in Drowsy Silence, but the Great Prima Donna, Mme. Tetrazzini, Did Not Appear. She Was Resting at Home on Her Couch, and That Morning's Rest Cost Her \$4,000. The Photograph on the Right Shows the Diva's Couch and Pet Dog.



Walter Damrosch Leading His Great Symphony Orchestra.

and fur coat. He hurried away. But there was no further word from her. We reached Mme. Schumann Heink through her manager. She obligingly consented to sing.

"Did Mme. Schumann Heink rehearse? Assuredly she did. No excuses. No airs."

Benjamin Franklin Spellman, attorney for Mme. Tetrazzini, gave this as the famous soprano's own version of the affair. Mme. Tetrazzini disavows any airs or capricious prima donna whims and puts all the blame on Mr. Damrosch:

"I had arrived in New York after a long and fatiguing journey from Grand Rapids, Mich. Our accommodations from Cincinnati were very bad. I was worn out with the journey. I arrived in New York at midnight on Friday. I was not sufficiently rested to attend rehearsals Saturday morning. I sent my accompanist, Count Pietro Clamara, an excellent musician, who, with his wife, travels with me, to show Mr. Damrosch, my tempi for the passages. Mr. Damrosch was quite rude

to him. He said to him: 'Tell Madame Tetrazzini to be here at twelve.' It was then six minutes of twelve. I dress and get from the Hotel Knickerbocker to Park avenue and Thirty-fourth street in six minutes. It is humorous.

"I love my public! My dear public I would never disappoint! So what do I do when the management of the Oratorio Society telephone to me and say, 'You need not sing. Your engagement is cancelled? Do I stay still in my bed? Or do I take the train to the dear Cincinnati, where I am next to sing on Wednesday, and where I am to be entertained the day before? No. I say I will stay and go to the concert. If Mr. Damrosch gets over his whim I will rise in a box and sing without rehearsal. I go. I send someone to buy the tickets. I go to the concert. I take with me my accompanist, my countryman, Count Pietro Clamara, and his wife, the Countess.

"I take also my lawyer, Mr. Spellman, who won for me my case against Oscar Hammerstein for breach of contract. I

take, too, his wife and his charming young daughter. I enjoy it. I meet in the lobby many persons I know. I shake hands with them. I am happy. I enjoy the concert. It is very good. I take my friends home to dinner. I have a pleasant afternoon. And I sue the Oratorio Society for four thousand dollars because I have not been allowed to sing at the concert."

Jules Diaber, concert manager for Luisa Tetrazzini and Rosa Raisa, maintained a judicial attitude. He said:

"I am very sorry that Mme. Tetrazzini did not attend the rehearsals. While it is not stipulated in the contract that she must attend rehearsals, it is understood that if requests are made for attendance at rehearsals they must be met. I communicated with Mme. Tetrazzini while she was on tour, asking her to be at rehearsals with the Symphony Orchestra of New York at 10 on Saturday. When I was notified that she was not present I was confident that she was merely detained and would be present. I was amazed when I learned of her defiance.

"On the other hand I wish Mr. Damrosch had borne with her with patience. It is admissible for an artist of renown to send to the conductor music with tempi marked in lieu of a rehearsal. But Mr. Damrosch refused to entertain this substitute. In my opinion they were both wrong."

Benjamin Franklin Spellman said: "I shall bring suit at once against the Oratorio Society under whose auspices the music festival was given, for breach of contract. I shall ask it for \$4,000, which is Madame Tetrazzini's figure for a concert appearance. If she gives the concert she gets \$8,000 of the receipts. This is a fight for principle. I take the cases of music artists against managers because I am for the freedom of the artist. I am opposed to the Czar-like domination of the director who roars 'Come here' or 'Go,' at his will."

A little, awed, rotund man connected with the management of the New York Symphony Society of New York said in a hushed tone: "Nobody has ever done this to Mr. Damrosch before and no one ever will again."

Madame Luisa Tetrazzini, Who Says That a Great Singer Does Not Need to Waste Her Time Rehearsing, and That a Competent Conductor With Properly Trained Musicians Ought to Be Able to Accompany a Real Artist Without a Rehearsal.